

CHAPTER 239

May 2, 2013

“Chie, Chie slow, slow the fuck... Oh god I think I’m dying.”

“Quit being such a cry baby. It’s just a little exercise.”

Justin came to a halt, leaning over and dry heaving as he tried to catch his breath. He just couldn’t keep up with a girl who did this on a daily basis. Justin had to do it on a weekly basis, if only because Chie forced him to. She figured that since he never exercised at all, he kind of needed it for his health, even if he’d rather not cough up a lung trying to keep up with her. Chie rolled her eyes and tapped her foot with impatience as Justin stopped to get his bearings.

“You know sometimes I swear you’re trying to kill me. If it’s for the life insurance, I’ll just give it to you, believe me!” Justin objected, pausing mid sentences as he tried to speak straight. Chie simply shook her head and crossed her arms with disapproval. How Justin managed to get through life when he couldn’t run for an hour without his lung exploding, Chie would never quite understand. But then, she couldn’t understand how Justin didn’t see the appeal in running around in the first place. What was there to like about getting sweaty and having your rib cages crack in half under pressure. “At the very least could you use rat poison or something next time?”

“This looks more like an accident.” Chie countered sarcastically. She wasn’t trying to kill Justin of course, but I’m sure Justin was well aware of that and just being a drama queen. Justin nodded with reluctant agreement.

“Right, right... Touche’.” He spat to the side, trying to get some dirt out of his mouth that had been lingering on the spring breeze. Mark that down as just another reason why running was awful. “Look, just give me... Just give me one min-”

“Did you see the Midnight Channel the other night?”

“TWO MINUTES. I MEANT TWO!” Justin immediately corrected himself in panic as he and Chie overheard a conversation going on across the street. This was, uh... quite the bombshell. The Midnight Channel had been off the air for a year now; how either of them would have been able to see it let alone know about it was beyond Justin’s realm of understanding. Perhaps it was just a misunderstanding; Justin was sure there was a porn channel or two called The Midnight Channel. Not to imply that those two were watching porn, but it was still a valid point. Justin and Chie stared at each other with horrified gazes as a name they had long since forgotten brushed their ears. They had thought that was all over... Perhaps it was just Teddie doing his

quiz show shtick again; and if so, thankfully Justin and Chie didn't advance to the finals. That was a plus.

"Midnight Channel!? Wha-!?" Chie gasped with exasperation. This had to be her just hearing something incorrectly, right? Maybe she was asking if she been to a certain body of water in the middle of the night. Yeah, that sounded about... Wait, what was she thinking? Inaba didn't have any channels running through it! All the same, it had to be something like that, it wouldn't make sense if it was THEIR Midnight Channel on the air. Justin held out his hands, palms facing towards Chie in a calming fashion.

"Alright, alright, let's stay calm... This is probably just a misunderstanding. With Izanami gone and Teddie on patrol, there's no way that thing's going to go on the air again." He tried to reassure her before facing back towards the gossiping girls. "...Still, we should probably make sure." He mumbled with concern. It was hard to convince himself that it was bullshit that was ringing through his ears right now, even though he knew logistically it probably was. He carefully crept towards the two girls, Chie following slowly behind him, eyes still wide with fear, palms sweaty at the thought of that place again. You know, she still had nightmares about what happened with Izanami, the hands crawling up her ankles to pull her to her death. She never knew that death would be so...horrifying. Was she even dead? Maybe it was just a dream. Whatever it was, it was traumatizing to say the least. It's probably why whenever she, or really any of the Investigation Team to be quite honest, saw someone reaching their hand around the corner or something jumped. And god forbid you sneak up on her; she would start crying if someone so much as touched her from behind. It took a stronger woman than Chie to move on from that shit; and given this was Chie we were talking about, I'm not sure there WAS a stronger woman.

"Hello, uh, ladies." Justin waved at the two girls as he approached them cautiously. He always hated speaking to people he didn't know; after all, he didn't want to seem like some creep just butting in on conversations or something like that. People had to approach him first under most conditions. These weren't normal conditions though. One of them seemed pretty finicky as he approached them, though the other just seemed bugged by his interruption.

"Th-That's the guy! Play it cool." One of the girls whispered to the other before standing up straight. Justin raised his eyebrow with confusion. He was that guy? Okay, uh... sure. That guy. Well that guy had some questions he'd like answered, so...

"You'll have to excuse my eavesdropping, but did you say Midnight Channel just now?" He questioned with interest. The girl who seemed to be standing up straight swooned slightly before leaning to whisper to the other girl again. Right, now Justin was very very confused.

“He’s just like what the television sai-“ The girl began to whisper before she noticed Chie approaching out of the corner of her eye. She froze for a moment before backing away abit. “Ch-Chie-chan!” She shouted in a frenzied panic. Justin passed Chie a quick glance. He was under the impression that they didn’t know each other; and he was mostly right. Chie shrugged a bit with confusion, not really sure why the girl was starting to freak out like that.

“Yeah, I heard that this time it’s like a fighting show and that the people on it were fighting each other...” The other girl spoke up, figuring that if her friend was going to act like a sociopath right now the very least she could do was answer the blonde kid’s question. She was speaking entirely from what she had heard from her friend though, so she wasn’t entirely sure how much use she could be.

“W-Well, please excuse us! C’m on, let’s go.” The other girl interrupted grabbing the other girl by the wrist as she quickly tried to flee the vicinity. And that just left a very confused Chie and Justin behind, staring at the two teenage girls running away like they were being chased by monsters. Justin paused for a moment, staring at his palm before breathing into it and taking a whiff. Nope, his breathe seemed fine. Had to have been something else.

“What was that? Did she not like me or something...? I didn’t do anything wrong, did I...?”

“Aww, how could anyone hate you Chie?” Justin frowned a bit, donning his own pair of puppy dog eyes. They needed work though, as they weren’t really as convincing as Justin believed they were. Chie could out puppy dog eye him any day of the week. He was gonna have to do better than that.

“She seemed to like you though.”

“I’m a likeable guy.”

“Is now really the time for jokes?”

“Ouch, right in my self esteem.”

“Yeah, no, I’m sure it’s nothing. Just relax- No... Really? You called Yosuke about this already? Well, uh... I guess that’s fine, but I still think this is just a stupid prank. You know Yosuke’s gonna get pissed at you if this is one big joke, right? ...No, I’m just saying that... Chill, Chie. It’ll be fine, I promise. Alright... Alright, love you too.”

Justin clicked his phone shut as he leaned back into the couch, eyes trained on the blank television screen on the parlor. Maya was sitting beside him, a bowl of popcorn between her legs as they stared at the television screen expecting what they knew wasn’t going to happen. So why the popcorn? Well the real show was

watching Justin make an ass out of himself chasing silly fables, and to a much lesser extent, hearing Chie panic on the other end of Justin's phone. She was looking too deep into what wasn't there, which is what made it so amusing that she seemed legitimately afraid something was going to happen. Justin sighed before dipping his hand into the bucket of popcorn.

"Hey, did I say you could have some?"

"I paid for it."

"Yeah, but I microwaved it."

"I'll be sure to get you a gold medal." Justin rolled his eyes as he popped the kernels of popcorn into his mouth. Maya shook her head as she dipped her hand in to grab a few pieces of her own. Not like there wasn't more where that came from she supposed.

"You really believe this shit?"

"Of course not, but Chie does and I know it'll make her feel better if I watch too. What harm could there be anyway?" Justin shrugged with indifference. He saw nothing wrong with doing something stupid for a friend. And that was something Maya could understand, so she'd give him the benefit of the doubt and say that it was Chie's idea in the first place to do this. It sounded like something Chie would do anyway. "Believe me when I saw that if that thing pops on, I'll eat my han-"

And just then the television flicked on. "...dful of popcorn." Justin tried to correct himself. He had already tried chewing his hand off for what he had thought impossible as it was already, he'd rather not do it again. Maya simply sat there with her jaw wide open... It... It was totally on. What in the fuck? Why was the Midnight Channel on? She blamed Teddie. And she wouldn't be entirely wrong as it turned out.

"Rivals... They are... Friends, yet powerful foes! The desperate fighting program amongst high school students! A new legend is about to start!" Justin immediately choked on the popcorn in his mouth as the screen cut away to show their apparent roster of fighters. Fighters including his friends. Including Chie. Including Yu for fuck's sake. Including his sister. But more importantly, including him. He never signed up for this, what the fuck? Maya had to pretty much jump and start squeezing on Justin's stomach to get him to spit the popcorn up after it got lodged in his throat. He turned out to be fine, though his carpet, not so much. Popcorn everywhere.

"What in the fuck?"

"May the manliest of all men come on down!"

"...Teddie. Why am I not surprised?" Justin rubbed at his temples with annoyance as Teddie's voice echoed through his television. He should have known Teddie was going to do something stupid. At the very least he seemed to have a good taste in costumes. The cape totally fit him. But let's not give him the idea that by any means he's allowed to wear a cape on a regular basis because of it. Or at all really. Justin wasn't going to stand for this. Well actually he was, because he immediately stood up from the couch and started to make his way to the television, where he was going to punch Teddie through the screen for being a dimwit... And then things got a lot more interesting.

"Nobody touches his precious Nanako! The Sister-Complex Kingpin of Steel, Yu Narukami." Justin froze a bit, eyebrow raised as the voice echoed through the television. Okay, that was... eerily accurate. Hell it was actually pretty funny... You know what Teddie? You might have given Justin and Chie a heart attack and nearly caused Justin to choke to death, but if he could make this show interesting, he might just let it slide. Justin slowly inched his way back to the couch before sitting back down on the sofa and bending down to reach the popcorn that had been scattered on his carpet.

"Want some?"

"...*Maybe.*" Maya grabbed the rest of the popcorn from Justin's palm. It was absolutely disgusting eating food off the floor, but she had eaten food out of worst places, so it didn't matter much to her. Further more, the show must go on after all, and what was a good movie without a bucket of popcorn.

"Wage slave in the boonies by day, hero by night! Captain Ressentiment, Yosuke Hanamura!" Maya froze as she was about to pop a piece of popcorn into her mouth, pupils reaching towards the corner of her eyes as she contemplated the matter. After a while she decided, Captain Ressentiment was actually a pretty accurate title. Not necessarily flattering, but accurate all the same. At the very least she had a new name to call him whenever he managed to piss her off. Which was at least once every week as of recent. There were just some days where he was the most insufferable human being on the face of the planet. He was so lucky the other six days of the week more than made up for it.

"See? Re-son-te-mon. I TOLD him that's how it was pronounced.

"A spunky dragon with deadly legs! The carnivore who's discarded womanhood, Chie Satonaka." And now it was Justin's turn to freeze in place. Now, that title was... mostly accurate, but that wasn't what had caused him to freeze in place. Oh no, it was the fact that knowing Chie, she had literally just kicked a hole in her television screen. And by that I mean she stuck her foot through the screen and kicked Teddie right in his fucking face. Which didn't seem to do much to the program itself if she did.

"Oh boy... Someone's walking away in a cast."

"Can you confirm or deny?"

"Confirm what?"

"Has she discarded her womanhood?"

"Depends what you mean by discarded."

"Gross."

"You asked." Justin shrugged. He wasn't going to get into the dirty little details, though I don't think it was any secret to the others by now that Chie and Justin... Well, you know. They didn't talk about it, they never acknowledged it happened the few times it did, but they didn't need to. There were these subtle signs; like the way both of them jumped a bit anytime Yosuke made a sex joke. Or that awkward pause Justin would make before making a porn joke. It was clear something had happened, and two and two just kind of fit together.

"You're up by the way."

"Huh?" Justin raised his eyes to the screen again. Sure enough, that looked like him on the screen, back turned to the camera and a revolver on the floor. He never recorded anything though, which concerned him. What, was that his shadow or something, or did Teddie hire a stunt double?

"An unruly youth with an even more unruly mouth. Captain Chivalry, Justin Tylor." Justin stuck his tongue out with disgust. You could tell captain Chivalry was entirely sarcastic by the way the announcer said it. He'd have you know he was totally chivalrous. Yeah, sure it sounded weird when he called himself that, but you know... What the fuck, it was true? Why not roll with the punches. Maya laughed at him all the same, much to Justin's annoyance.

"Oh yeah, sure, keep laughing."

"So, if you're captain chivalry, does that mean you get chivalrous super powers?"

"I'm ignoring you."

"The power to fit right in with a boy band."

"I will shank you."

"That wouldn't be very chivalrous."

"Fuck you."

"Neither would that." Yeah, so Justin was so close to wrapping his hands around Maya's neck and just strangling her to death right there. What wonders a name could do to one's disposition. In this case it made Justin want to murder someone, and Maya just happened to be the closest person nearby. AND egging him on on top of that. But that's okay. They say revenge is a dish best served cold, Justin preferred his scorching hot right from the oven.

"Silent but deadly. A Blooming Rose with Sharp Thorns, Maya Jefferies." And just like that Maya's jaw hit the floor. Now, she wasn't sure what to make of the flower comparison; in a way it was actually very thoughtful and sweet. And at the same point what had proceeded it had offended Maya to points she hadn't thought she could be offended. And the funny thing is, that it totally could have been a good thing but she took it the wrong way. Perhaps Teddie had anticipated that and picked that name purposely just to watch Maya squirm. Well played. Justin laughing hysterically at her as vengeance probably didn't help.

"Did I... just get compared to a fart?" Maya signed off with sorrowful displeasure. She would have accepted almost any name and been fine with it on grounds of good humor, but being called a fart because of her condition? Right in the feelings.

"Yeah now you know how it feels!" Justin countered, sticking his tongue out in victory. He was a-okay with this after what Maya had done for his name. She totally deserved the retribution she had gotten. Maya just sunk in her cheer, as if she had never been sadder in her life. A fucking fart. She didn't even get a cool nickname like 'kingpin,' or 'carnivore.' She got a fucking flower. That wasn't some deadly force to be reckoned with. Oh she had thorns? Those were mild inconveniences at best. What, was that the point? That she was a mild inconvenience? Teddie was killing her here.

"Please escort me to the ring, my prince! The Unconquerable Snow Black, Yukiko Amagi!" The announcer continued, disregarding pretty much everything else that was going on. Maya just flicked her hand in that 'you gotta be shitting me' mannerism as Yukiko got introduced.

"What the hell? She gets a cool name and I get 'silent but deadly.' Fucking hate Teddie."

"We all do."

"Blooming roses and bulging muscles! The Bloodcurdling Beefcake Emperor, Kanji Tatsumi!" Justin immediately started to look for the remote. From what he had seen when they rescued Kanji from the bathhouse, comparing him to a 'beefcake emperor' was not going to end well. The sooner he turned the channel off, the sooner they wouldn't have to see Kanji's junk. Again. God know Maya would just keep staring again. Yeah it's a penis, we get it. Everyone has one.

...

Wait... Let me rephrase that.

'The body of a child, the brain of a genius! The 2000-IQ Killjoy Detective.' Justin nodded his head with slight agreement as he leaned back on the couch again, relieved to find Kanji's air time had been cut off already. His eyes would be safe for another day.

"Well I wouldn't say genius. But I totally agree with Killjoy."

"I second that notion." Maya groaned and rolled her eyes. Naoto always did have it out for her; even after they had become 'friends' she would still ask suspicious questions from time to time that Maya knew was entirely related to what happened in California. And it pissed her off so much to constantly be harrassed for that. That was one of the many reasons she ran away from home in the first place. So she COULDN'T be questioned on a matter she wasn't sure she could lie her way out of.

"Who will win and survive towards the one throne at the end? Fierce fights, the battle begins tonight! The P1 Grand Prix!" And with that the television flicked off once again. Justin had to question how the battle began tonight when the Midnight Channel was clearly over. But then, he also had to question how the Midnight Channel was back on in the first place. It was entertaining, but concerning all the same. And speaking of concerns, Justin's phone began to ring not even ten seconds after the show went off the air. It was pretty obvious who it was. Justin sighed as he flipped the phone open and pressed it against his ears.

"Hel-"

"What the hell was that carnivore who discarded womanhood crap!? I haven't discarded it! I HAVEN'T, YOU HEAR ME!? I eat vegetables too, you know! And I haven't discarded my womanhood!"

"Chie, I am like... literally the last person on the face of this planet you need to explain that too."

"...What's that supposed to mean." Justin paused for a moment. Was that suddenly a sensitive topic. He took one long glance at his phone, then at Maya. As if she were reading his mind, she immediately made a cutting motion along her throat, telling Justin to cut his losses and just keep his mouth shut.

"Uh... I'm uh... Going through a tunnel! Pfffffffffffffffff... Sorry Chie, can't, Pfffffffffffffffff, hear, Pfffffffffffffffff..."

"No you're not, you're just making noises with your mou-" And with that Justin hung up his phone and immediately threw it across the room. He was more afraid of his girlfriend than he was anything on the Midnight Channel.

"So uh... I'm guessing 'carnivore' is also pretty accurate."

"Deadly legs would also be applicable."

"Yeah, but I get the feeling you mean something else when you say deadly legs."

"No, no, see that's all in the hip- Oh goddammit Maya."